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# Getting testy over toxins

*EPA*  
**Frustrations flare  
over nagging issues at  
Henderson Road sites**

By Sally Kuhn  
CITIZEN STAFF

The City Council's Finance and Property Subcommittee voted 3-0 to recommend a \$169,000 appropriation for additional testing on the Vitale, General Aviation and Nike sites in North Beverly. The recommendation will be presented to the full city council in its Monday, Nov. 6 meeting and there will be another hearing on the matter before the council's final vote on Nov. 20.

Ransom Environmental Consultants, Inc. has been conducting tests on the three Henderson Road sites between Wenham Lake and the Beverly Municipal Airport.

The request for additional tests resulted from questions that Conservation Commis-

sion Chairman David Lang had about Ransom Environmental Consultants, Inc.'s draft of its Phase II report filed earlier this year. Lang and REC President Steve Ransom formulated a work plan for the additional tests, which will take three months to complete.

Contaminants on those sites could be a threat to Wenham Lake, Beverly's drinking water supply.

The city council will have time to get some answers to questions brought up at Monday's meeting, which included public input, according to Finance and Property Subcommittee Chairman Joyce McMahon.

Citizen Mary Rodrick, of Peabody Avenue, for instance, asked what kind of metals would be examined. Many others wanted to know how far Wenham Lake is from the Vitale property.

Monday night's meeting was the result

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of a motion made by Council President Tim Flaherty during a contentious Finance and Property Subcommittee meeting the preceding Wednesday night. He had requested that the earlier meeting be reconvened Monday night before a vote was taken, to allow all parties to be heard.

Flaherty's motion caused angry words to fly between Flaherty, McMahon and Mayor Bill Scanlon. Scanlon and McMahon had been against extending the hearing.

#### Other towns involved

The controversy over the additional tests has spread beyond Beverly's borders.

Wenham Selectman Tom Tanous and Salem Councilor at Large Tom Furey attended the Monday hearing, as did members of HealthLink, an environmental group from Marblehead. HealthLink has been especially concerned about fly ash dumped

on the Vitale property by the PG&E power plant in Salem.

A regional approach should be taken to the testing and cleanup of the properties, Furey said, since Salem and Wenham also use Wenham Lake for their drinking water.

Finance Director John Dunn hoped the funding for the tests could also become regional. At one point in the meeting, he asked, "Do you guys in Salem and Wenham want to help us pay for this?"

At the meeting, the tests raised larger issues. Residents like Toni Musante, of Willow Street, wanted the city council to come up with a development plan for the properties around Wenham Lake before voting on the tests. They are afraid development could cause Wenham Lake to be contaminated.

Scanlon previously proposed constructing playing fields and a skating rink on the Vitale site.

At last Wednesday's subcommit-

tee hearing, Nathan Zoll, of Orchard Avenue, asked the city council to conserve the Vitale property in perpetuity. Mayor Jack Monahan and the Board of Alderman transferred the land to the Conservation Commission in 1988, Zoll noted. He asked the city council for a mission statement saying the city would seal and cap the property.

The Nike and General Aviation sites might bring in some revenue for the city, Scanlon

said at the hearing on Wednesday. Some parties have expressed interest in buying the site.

The Kelleher property, part of the Burnham Land Trust, just went on the market for \$4 million, Musante said, adding the owners will not allow

anybody on the property to do testing.

"What assurances are there is not a problem on that site? she asked.

(The Burnham Land Trust is 70 acres which fronts on Cabot Street and abuts the Beverly Airport land, the Vitale and Nike sites.)

The Gulf of Maine Research Center of Salem did a report on the Burnham Land Trust property in 1986. The report said that metals like selenium, barium, chromium, cadmium and lead found in wells on the property exceeded the maximum allowable in drinking water. Finding no contamination on site, researchers thought it came from the Vitale property.

REC will test on the border of the Burnham Land Trust, City Engineer Frank Killilea said.

"That will give us a hint if there is a

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**Richard Renevento**

problem," Killilea said.

#### New testing plan

Ransom's new plan calls for new monitoring wells, and soil samples from all three Henderson Road sites. Additional deep monitoring wells, one 80 feet deep, will be dug on all three sites. Five or six deep wells will be installed on the Vitale site along Route 97 as it goes down to Wenham Lake.

According to Lang's report, deep-well testing was necessary to detect a very high concentration of a solvent, a degreaser, called TCE (trichloro-ethylene) on the General Aviation Service property. Since the property is on a higher grade than the Vitale property,

the TCE could flow to the Vitale property and eventually toward Wenham Lake.

"Because waste TCE can have a density greater than water," Lang said, "deep wells are necessary to verify its presence or absence in the deep aquifer."

Several deep wells, also requested by Lang, will be drilled to or into the bedrock to determine the extent of pollution from 55-gallon drums that had been dumped, by an unknown source, at the Vitale site.

State Rep. Michael Cahill, who endorsed the tests, said he had spoken to Lang the morning before Monday's subcommittee meeting. Lang had not attended the earlier Wednesday subcommittee meeting, or the subsequent Monday meeting.

"Lang feels the tests will provide

answers as to whether TCE and arsenic found on the Vitale property are a concern," Cahill said.

Lang is hopeful, but not convinced that we don't need to do remediation at Vitale. He thinks, however, a cleanup will have to be done at the General Aviation site, where the high concentration of TCE was found, Cahill added.

Beverly Salem Water Board Supervisor Tom Knowlton agreed with the additional testing.

"He's waiting for the results," Killilea said.

Some members in the audience at Monday night's meeting were not convinced that testing would be comprehensive enough to include all the contaminants which could be found on all three properties.

"Licensed Site Professionals, like those at Ransom don't just punch holes at the site like Swiss cheese," Killilea said. "If a sample reveals a contaminant then the LSP does more tests to zero in on it."

Citizens like Ron Johnson, of the Brimbal Avenue Neighborhood Association, said he did not trust REC's results.

City Councilor at Large Paul Guanci asked if another Licensed Site Professional should be brought in to undertake the additional tests.

Killilea said it would cost the city \$200,000 to hire another company and bring them up to speed.

McMahon said that if anybody has the documentation that the lab tests or Ransom's work are faulty, they should write a letter to the city engineer.

Richard Benevento, member of the Conservation Committee and a consulting engineer said the meeting was going around in circles.

"Either trust Ransom, Lang and

Killilea, or start back at square one and hire another consultant," he said. "Ransom is not going to jeopardize its license by hiding anything."

#### Picking up the tab

Lori Erlich, of HealthLink, suggested that Ransom reclassify the site from a Tier III to a Tier I site. With a Tier I classification, she said, the site would come under the jurisdiction of the state Department of

Environmental Protection (DEP) or the Federal Environmental Protection Agency, Beverly could then get super funding for the cleanup.

A search could be made for prior owners, or anyone allowed to dump there. The owners and dumpers

could be asked for cleanup money.

Erlich quoted from Lang's report on Ransom's draft Phase II: "Because Ransom found extremely high levels of TCE, indicative of 'DNAPL' in the bedrock, are you planning to rescore this site...?"

DNAPL occurs when dense air vapors emanating from the contaminated soil migrate downward into the water table causing a chemical plume to enlarge and spread. Rescoring the site could lead to a reclassification.

According to state DEP regulations, the site could also be reclassified if any part of it was within 500 feet of the lake. Hale Street resident Rene Mary showed the city council maps which she said showed the Vitale site within 500 feet of Wenham Lake. Ransom had not found the accurate edge of the lake, she said.

According to Ransom, the closest point of Vitale site is a half-mile from Wenham Lake.

The next hearing on the appropriation for additional tests will be Nov. 6.

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Frank Killilea